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ABSTRACT

A survey was conducted in seven laboratory schools in order to determine teachers' experience, concerns, and insights as they relate to teaching as a career and various features of education reform. Laboratory schools in nine states participated in the study: Alabama, Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Iowa, South Carolina, and Tennessee. Major findings in the category of teaching as a career indicated that teachers from large communities were more positive about teaching being a good career for males, and job availability and security were viewed more positively by teachers from schools with larger student enrollment. Teacher opinions on educational reform indicated that teachers from smaller communities view restriction of teachers to instructing only in their subject matter major more positively than teachers from larger schools; they also viewed standardized testing of student more positively than teachers from larger schools. Nine tables present specific information on the variables taken into consideration in the study. (JD)

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The Teaching Profession As A Career Opportunity: Perceptions of Laboratory School Teachers

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Introduction

Laboratory school teachers have an opportunity to not only practice current teaching methods but to influence the development of prospective teachers. Their views offer a unique insight into the teaching profession. The authors surveyed teachers in seven laboratory schools. The objective was to determine this population's experience, concerns, and insights as they relate to teaching as a career and various features of educational reform. Specific questions addressed in the research are listed below:

1. How do laboratory school teachers perceive the teaching profession as a career opportunity?
2. Do laboratory school teachers, categorized on the bases of background variables, differ in their perceptions of the teaching profession.
3. Are there background variables which discriminate independently or in combination between laboratory school teachers who would choose teaching again and those who would not?
4. Are there items related to perceptions which discriminate independently or in combination between laboratory school teachers who would choose teaching again and those who would not?
5. How do laboratory school teachers perceive various features of educational reform?
6. Do laboratory school teachers, categorized on the bases of background variables, differ in their perceptions of educational reform?

Perspective

The authors of this proposal have been involved with researching the teaching profession as a career opportunity since 1980. The need for research was originally stimulated by a declining teacher education enrollment and a predicted teacher shortage in Georgia. The authors have since surveyed high school seniors, pre-service teachers at various points in their preparation, in-service teachers throughout the Southeast and State Teachers of the Year. Six major findings are listed below.

1. A predictive factor in whether high school seniors choose teaching as a future career is simply whether or not anyone has discussed the career possibility with them.
2. Females and Blacks generally view the teaching profession in a more positive manner than do white males.
3. Encouraging factors related to teaching identified in all previous studies include: contributions to humanity and job security.
4. Major discouraging factors identified in previous studies include: salary, discipline problems, and working conditions.

5. Reform issues receiving strongest support include: higher teacher salaries, mentor teachers to assist and supervise beginning teachers, and more state funding for educational programs.
6. Reform issues viewed as undesirable included: longer school days, use of standardized test scores in determining student promotion, and standardized testing of teachers as a basis for teacher credentializing and licensing.

Other researchers have conducted similar studies. According to a report by the National Commission for Excellence in Teacher Education (1985), inadequate salaries, limited advancement opportunities, stressful work environments, and lack of status and autonomy discourage many of the best students from ever considering careers in teaching. The same factors cause many teachers to exit the profession after a few years. Unfortunately this is often when their skills are highly developed and their potential contributions are the greatest.

Most of the research related to teaching as a career has been conducted with general pools of subjects or those who have encountered difficulty with the profession. An appropriate population for consultation on the topics of teaching as a career and educational reform issues is that of laboratory school teachers. These individuals have the unique distinction of significantly influencing children, as well as of contributing to the development of prospective teachers. Their pedagogical, theoretical, and curricular foundations are tested and proven daily. Because of their unique experience responses from these subjects related to teaching as a career opportunity and current educational reform issues may provide greater insight into the profession.

Data Source

Laboratory schools in nine states were contacted to participate in the study. An attempt was made to select schools from different parts of the country. The seven schools responding were from Alabama, Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Iowa, South Carolina, and Tennessee.

Respondents included 71 females and 32 males. There were 47 elementary teachers (K-5), 8 middle grades teachers (6-8), 23 high school teachers (9-12), and 25 combination level teachers. Thirty-nine of the teachers were associated with schools which include grades K-8 and sixty-four were associated with schools which include grades K-12.

Methods

An instrument was designed by the researchers to ascertain perceptions of laboratory school teachers relative to: 1) the teaching profession as a career; and 2) 21 reform recommendations. Several sources significantly contributed to item selection for

the instrument including Gallup Research Corporation, Carnegie Forum, and the National Commission on Excellence in Teacher Education. The four page instrument, accompanied by a cover letter, was mailed to nine laboratory schools. Seven schools responded, returning 103 instruments which were used in the data analysis.

Three statistics were calculated for data analysis. Frequency statistics were used to determine percentages for each item on the instrument. Analysis of variance determined significant differences between groups of respondents on the basis of selected background variables. Finally, a discriminate analysis statistic was used to determine factors which discriminate independently, or in combination, between subjects who would select teaching again as a career and those who would not.

Results

Teaching as a Career Choice

Frequency statistics revealed generally positive perceptions of factors related to teaching as a career opportunity. Factors in teaching that were viewed as most encouraging were contributions to humanity, job security, certification requirements, and working conditions. Factors viewed as most discouraging were salary and social status. Specific findings are identified on Table 2.

Analysis of variance indicated ten significant differences at the .05 level between groups categorized on the basis of background variables. Specific findings are identified on Table 3. Some of the major findings are indicated below:

1. Teachers from larger communities were more positive about teaching being a good career for males.
2. Teachers from schools with a larger student enrollment viewed job availability and job security more positively than teachers from small schools.
3. Teachers instructing middle level students expressed more enjoyment of teaching than those instructing at the elementary level.
4. High school teachers were more positive about teaching being a good career for females than elementary teachers.
5. Teachers with lower undergraduate GPA's were more positive about working conditions and teaching being a good career for females than those with higher GPA's.
6. Females viewed student cooperation as a more encouraging factor than did males.

Discriminate analysis statistics revealed eleven variables that independently discriminated between those who would choose teaching again and those who would not. Background variables combined to predict with a 70% accuracy which teachers would

choose teaching again. The perceptions of various factors related to teaching combined to make this prediction with an 85.1% accuracy. Background variables and perceptions of teaching combined to correctly classify cases with an 96.2% accuracy. Discriminate analysis information is identified on Tables 4-7.

Educational Reform Considerations

Frequency statistics revealed mixed views on educational reform considerations. Reform considerations receiving the strongest support included: higher teacher salaries, mentor teachers to assist beginning teachers, more state and federal funding for educational programs, and a partnership between universities and community schools. Reform considerations viewed as undesirable included: abolition of undergraduate major in education, longer school days, and the use of standardized test scores to determine student promotion. Specific findings are identified on Table 8.

Analysis of variance indicated twenty significant differences at the .05 level between groups categorized on the basis of background variables. Specific findings are identified on Table 9. Some of the major findings are indicated below:

1. Teachers from smaller communities view restriction of teachers to instructing only in their subject matter major more positively than teachers from larger communities.
2. Teachers from small schools view standardized testing of students at every grade level more positively than teachers from large schools.
3. Elementary teachers view increased academic curriculum in high schools more positively than teachers from combination schools.
4. Elementary teachers view the use of standardized test for student promotion more positively than teachers from combination schools.
5. Teachers with a specialist degree view less emphasis on athletics and other extracurricular activities more positively than teachers with a baccalaureate degree.

Educational Importance

The uniqueness of their tasks does indeed afford laboratory school teachers an access to a wealth of pertinent data on teaching and reform. As depicted in this study, there are areas of support, as well as areas of concern. The general public, along with individuals in decision making positions, can be a better informed citizenry by becoming aware of the perceptions of laboratory school teachers. Our task, then, is to determine avenues for appropriately channeling such information.

Table 1

Background Information for Laboratory Teachers

	Variable	Percentages
1.	Population of community in which school is located:	
	a. less than 10,000	0
	b. 10,000 to 20,000	17.6
	c. 20,001 to 50,000	44.3
	d. 50,001 to 100,000	18.3
	e. more than 100,000	19.8
2.	Student enrollment of school:	
	a. less than 300	7.6
	b. 300 to 750	71.0
	c. 751 to 1200	20.6
	d. 1201 to 1650	.8
	e. more than 1650	0
3.	Organizational structure of school:	
	a. elementary grades	38.2
	b. middle grades/junior high	0
	c. high school	0
	d. combination	61.8
4.	Grade level(s) taught:	
	a. elementary	45.8
	b. middle grades/junior high	7.6
	c. high school	22.1
	d. combination	24.5

5.	Number of subjects taught:		
	a.	one	19.4
	b.	two	17.1
	c.	three	10.1
	d.	four	14.7
	e.	more than four	38.8
6.	Highest degree attained:		
	a.	baccalaureate	8.4
	b.	master's	71.0
	c.	specialist	9.9
	d.	doctorate	10.7
7.	Undergraduate major:		
	a.	art	2.3
	b.	business	3.1
	c.	early childhood	4.6
	d.	elementary	29.8
	e.	English	8.4
	f.	foreign language	2.3
	g.	health and physical education	7.6
	h.	home economics	4.6
	i.	industrial arts	1.5
	j.	language arts	0
	k.	math	6.9
	l.	music	2.3
	m.	science	10.7
	n.	social science	6.1
	o.	special education	.8
	p.	education (general)	.8
	q.	other	8.4

8. Undergraduate grade point average:

a.	2.0 to 2.49	.8
b.	2.5 to 2.99	25.2
c.	3.0 to 3.49	36.6
d.	3.5 to 3.99	35.9
e.	4.0	1.5

9. Most influential person in decision to teach:

a.	family member	30.2
b.	elementary teacher	13.5
c.	elementary principal	.8
d.	high school teacher	20.6
e.	high school principal	.8
f.	school counselor	1.6
g.	friend	9.5
h.	other	23.0

10. Family members serving in field of education:

a.	brother	14.1
b.	daughter	7.8
c.	father	14.1
d.	mother	21.9
e.	sister	28.1
f.	son	8.6
g.	spouse	36.7
h.	none	33.6

11. Age at which individual initially developed an interest in teaching:

a.	younger than 12	16.8
b.	12-15	9.9
c.	16-18	28.2
d.	19-21	26.7
e.	22-25	13.7
f.	older than 25	4.6

12.	Current age:		
	a.	21-30	9.2
	b.	31-40	32.1
	c.	41-50	41.2
	d.	51-60	12.2
	e.	61-70	5.3
	f.	older than 70	0
13.	Sex:		
	a.	female	68.7
	b.	male	31.3
14.	Race:		
	a.	black	6.2
	b.	hispanic	.8
	c.	other	.8
	d.	white	92.3

Table 2

Perceptions of Teaching as a Career Opportunity

Variables	Percentages			
	Very Encouraging	Encouraging	Discouraging	Very Discouraging
A. Factors in teaching				
1. certification requirements	7.3	58.1	31.5	3.2
2. contributors to humanity	67.7	30.8	1.5	0
3. fringe benefits	7.8	46.5	31.8	14.0
4. job availability	6.9	50.0	36.9	6.2
5. job security	16.2	63.8	15.4	4.6
6. parental support	10.0	43.1	38.5	8.5
7. salary	4.6	16.9	53.1	25.4
8. social status	3.8	33.1	50.8	12.3
9. student cooperation	9.2	49.2	36.9	4.6
10. working conditions	7.7	55.4	31.5	5.4
	All of the time	Most of the time	Some of the time	Not at all
B. Enjoyment of teaching				
1. I enjoy teaching:	26.9	70.0	1.5	1.5
2. Most teachers enjoy teaching:	0	56.9	40.8	2.3

	Yes	Possibly	Doubtfully	No
C. Teacher candidates				
1. Teaching is a good career for females	69.4	27.4	3.2	0
2. Teaching is a good career for males	54.8	33.9	7.3	4.0
3. I would encourage an interested daughter to pursue teaching	54.0	25.8	9.7	10.5
4. I would encourage an interested son to pursue teaching	48.4	24.4	12.1	16.1

	Yes	No
D. Your career choice		
If you could start all over again, would you choose teaching as a career	79.4	20.7

Table 3 Perceptions of Teaching

Significant Differences at the .05 Level Between Groups Categorized on the Bases of Background Variables

Variables Significant Items	F. Prob.	Direction of Significance
Population of community		
good career for males	.0131	20,001-100,000 > 10,000-20,000
Student enrollment		
job availability	.0405	751-1200 > less than 300
job security	.0080	751-1200 > less than 300
Organizational structure		
good career for females	.0096	Combination > Elementary
Grade Level Taught		
I enjoy teaching	.0322	Middle > Elementary
good career for females	.0199	High School > Elementary
Grade point average		
working conditions	.0113	2.0-2.99 > 3.5-3.99
good career for females	.0083	3.0-3.49 > 3.5-3.99
Most influential person		
salary	.0020	Friend > Elementary Teacher
Sex		
student cooperation	.0379	Female > Male

Table 4

Variables Which Independently Discriminate Between Those Who Would and Would Not Choose Teaching Again

Variable	Level of Significance
Student enrollment	.0177
Degree	.0112
Perceptions	
fringe benefits	.0059
salary	.0029
social status	.0004
personal enjoyment of teaching	.0000
perception of others' enjoyment of teachers	.0028
good career for females	.0064
good career for males	.0002
would encourage interested daughter	.0000
would encourage interested son	.0000

Table 5

Background Variables

Discriminant Analysis Classification Results

Discriminant Groups	Predicted Group Membership	
	Would choose again	Would not choose again
Would choose teaching again (85%)	69%	31%
Would not choose teaching again (15%)	25%	75%

Grouped cases correctly classified: 70%

Table 6

Perceptions of Teaching as a Career

Discriminant Analysis Classification Results

Discriminant Groups	Predicted Group Membership	
	Would choose again	Would not choose again
Would choose teaching again (78%)	85%	15%
Would not choose teaching again (22%)	16%	84.%

Grouped cases correctly classified: 85.1%

Table 7

Background Variables and Perceptions of Teaching

Discriminant Analysis Classification Results

Discriminant Groups	Predicted Group Membership	
	Would choose again	Would not choose again
Would choose teaching again (79%)	95%	4.9%
Would not choose teaching again (21%)	0%	100%

Grouped cases correctly classified: 96.2%

Table 8

Perceptions of Educational Reform Considerations

Reforms	Percentages			
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. abolition of undergraduate major in education	7.0	9.4	40.6	43.0
2. career ladders with differentiated salaries in relationship to accomplishments	10.9	52.7	22.5	14.0
3. certification based on classroom performance	13.2	57.4	25.6	3.9
4. differentiated staffing; certified teachers assisted by interns, instructors, paraprofessionals, etc.	30.7	52.0	10.2	7.1
5. higher teacher salaries	83.7	16.3	0	0
6. increased academic curriculum in high schools	29.7	43.0	24.2	3.1
7. less emphasis on athletics and other extracurricular activities	17.8	39.5	26.4	16.3
8. longer school days	3.9	10.2	52.3	33.6
9. longer school year	8.6	18.8	39.8	32.8
10. mentor teachers to assist and supervise beginning teachers	52.3	42.3	3.8	1.5
11. more federal funding for educational programs	45.0	34.9	17.8	2.3
12. more state funding for educational programs	55.5	42.2	1.6	.8
13. national board certification process	17.3	32.3	30.7	19.7
14. partnerships between college/ universities and community schools	49.6	48.0	2.4	0

15. public education for four year olds	7.9	26.8	42.5	22.8
16. requirement for students to do homework	15.2	39.2	39.2	6.4
17. requirement of five years for collegiate teacher training	16.7	43.7	29.4	10.3
18. restriction of teachers to instructing only in their subject matter major	25.2	35.4	30.7	8.7
19. standardized testing of teachers as a basis for teacher credentializing and licensing	3.1	24.0	46.5	26.4
20. standardized testing of students at every grade level	6.3	27.3	37.5	28.9
21. use of standardized test scores in determining student promotion	5.5	9.4	44.1	40.9

Table 9 Educational Reform Consideration

Significant Differences at the .05 Level Between Groups Categorized on the Bases of Background Variables

Variables Significant Items	F. Prob.	Direction of Significance
Population of community		
partnership between college/ universities and community schools	.0081	more than 50,000 > 10,000-20,000
restriction of teachers to instructing only in their subject matter major	.0000	10,000-20,000 > more than 50,000
Student enrollment		
national board certification process	.0214	less than 300 > 300-750
standardized testing of students at every grade level	.0024	less than 300 > 300-1200
Organizational structure		
abolition of undergraduate major in education	.0486	Combination > Elementary
differentiated staffing	.0052	Elementary > Combination
increased academic curriculum in high schools	.0034	Elementary > Combination
longer school days	.0131	Combination > Elementary
partnership between colleges/ universities and community schools	.0188	Combination > Elementary
public education for 4 yr. olds	.0444	Combination > Elementary
restrictions to instructing only in subject matter	.0003	Elementary > Combination
use of standardized tests for student promotion	.0400	Elementary > Combination

Number of preparations		
abolition of undergraduate major in education	.0010	4, 1 > 5 or more
longer school days	.0063	1 > 4 or more
requirements for students to do homework	.0253	1 > 5 or more
Highest degree attained		
increased academic curriculum in high school	.0234	Specialist > Baccalaureate
less emphasis on athletics and other extracurricular activities	.0085	Specialist > Baccalaureate
longer school days	.0301	Doctorate > Specialist
public education for 4 yr. olds	.0077	Doctorate > Specialist
Present age		
higher teacher salaries	.0101	31-40 > 51-60
Sex		
restriction of teachers to instruct only in subject major	.0482	Female > Male